

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 17:10:2006

Reading: Acts 1:1-11

THE CHURCH ABLAZE (1)

1. IS CHRIST'S WORK FINISHED OR NOT ?

A prominent American evangelist was coming to a particular city for a gospel crusade, and there was a preacher in that city who did not want him to come. He was a modernist and he said, “ *if that preacher comes to this city he will set evangelism back 50 years.*” The evangelist upon hearing this said, “ *I don't want to set evangelism back 50 years, but 2,000 years.*” Now that's what we need to do in these days, we need to *get back to the basic's*. One reason I love to study the book of Acts is it's uniqueness. ***It is the sourcebook for the spread of early Christianity.*** Without it we would know little about the apostolic church except what would be gleaned from Paul's epistles. It is the chronicle of the spreading flame of the Holy Spirit ! It also a book with a splendid theme, tracing the work of the Holy Spirit through the birth, infancy, and adolescence of the Church !

It's title could well be “ *The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles,*” or “ *The Acts of the Risen or Glorified Christ through the apostles.*” Now this book forms the perfect counterpart and contrast to the Gospels. In the Gospels the Son of Man offered His life, in Acts the Son of God offered His power. The

Gospels tell us of Christ crucified and risen, Acts speaks of Christ ascended and exalted. The Gospels model the Christian life as lived by the perfect Man, Acts models it as lived out by imperfect men. Now before we get into our study this I want to give some background information about the book of Acts ! I want you to note:

(1) The AUTHOR of the Book:

Look at (1:1) In an indirect way that verse tells who wrote the book of Acts ! Look at (Lk 1:3-4) Now Luke wrote his gospel for Theophilus. Then when he wrote a sequel the book of Acts for Theophilus he referred to his gospel as “ *the former treatise.*” (1:1) Now Luke is not mentioned often in the New Testament. He appears in three verses: (Col 4:14: 2 Tim 4:11: Phil 24) Consequently, little is known about him. Colossians tells us he was a medical doctor. Second Timothy says he was a companion to the imprisoned apostle Paul. The context of the Colossians reference suggests Luke was a Gentile making him perhaps the only Gentile writer of the New Testament ! (1)

(2) The AIM of the Book:

Look at (1:1) again. Because Luke referred to his gospel as “ *the former treatise,*” we can consider Acts to be the second volume of Luke's writings ! The gospel of Luke deals with what Jesus “ *began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up,*” Acts deals with what Christ continued to do, after He

was taken up, through the Holy Spirit in the lives of the *apostles*. (1:24 2:33,47) Now what Luke is saying is this. In the Gospel I showed you all that Christ *started*

to do, in the book of Acts I am showing you all that Christ *continues* to do ! The Gospel of Luke tells us of Christ's ministry while on earth in a *Physical Body*, the book of Acts tells us of Christ's ministry from heaven, through His *Spiritual Body*, the church !

My Christ is still alive and active. He just has a different body for ministry. You say, “ *where is the body of Christ ?*” Sitting in this building. Christ lives in us. (Col 1:27) Have you discovered that God does not want you to do anything for Him ? What He wants is that He would do something through you ? Now notice what Dr. Luke is saying, “ *I wrote the Gospel, that's what Jesus began to do, I am writing this book, that's what Jesus is continuing to do.*” So the *Aim* of this book is to show us Christ's ministry from heaven, through His Spiritual Body the church !

Chronologically arranged, the contents of the book cover a 30 year period from about AD 30 when Christ ascends to heaven, to AD 60 when Paul takes the gospel to Rome ! Where do the events in Acts take place ? Well, like a travelogue Acts tours the ancient world taking us to Jerusalem to what is now Syria and Turkey, then hop scotching across the Mediterranean to Greece and finally Italy ! *Geography is a key* to understanding the book, in fact, it is one of several ways to unlock its outline ! Look at,

(3) The ANALYSIS of the Book:

Presented to us in (1:8) Now we could outline the book biographically, focusing on Peter in (chs 1-12) and Paul in (chs 13- 28), but the best way to outline the book is geographically, using (1:8) as a guide ! Now this verse summarises the entire book. (chs 1-7) describe *the church established at Jerusalem*. In (chs 8 - 12) we see *the church scattered to Judea and Samaria*. Finally, in (ch 13 - 28) we see *the church extended to the remotest part of the earth*. **Established, Scattered, Extended !** Do those three words not tell us something about:

(4) The APPLICATION of the Book:

You see Luke's story of the church remarkably resembles our own Christian development. For we, too, go through stages of **Establishing**: As new Christians, we enter a period of putting down roots. Its a nurturing time when Christ holds us close to Himself, often protecting us from many of life's pains and giving us a sturdy foundation. Then according to His timetable, the next phase begins, **Scattering**: Persecution and pain, discomfort and disappointment are the watermarks of this stage, as Christ allows trials to wash over our lives.

My through such times, the Lord strengthens us so that, eventually, we enter another phase of life.

Extending: For having profited from life's buffeting, we become seasoned, mature servants of Christ warts and all. Now He uses us as proven and worthy vessels that overflow with the message of Christ's power unhindered !

Now having given you a little bit about (1) (2) (3) (4) we turn to our subject, “**IS CHRIST'S WORK FINISHED OR NOT ?**” Well, notice what Luke says in (1:1) Underscore the word “*began.*” The word “*began,*” implies that Christ's work on earth was not finished, and yet in His high priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus said, “*I have finished the work which Thou givest me to do.*” (Jn 17:4) When He died on the cross, He said, “*It is finished.*” (Jn 19:30) I think the reason Luke said Christ's work had *begun* is because he was referring to the work of evangelism and teaching. Christ's redemptive work on the cross **is** done, but the work of evangelism and teaching God's Word is not ! That's why in these opening verses we see,

(1) THE RISEN LORD CONVEYING

He's imparting truth to the apostles and its interesting to notice, what Christ imparted: how Christ imparted it, and to whom He imparted it ! Look at (1:1) again. Incidentally, Theophilus is a combination of two Greek words. It means “*beloved of God,*” or “*friend of God.*” Little is known about him. Second-century sources indicate he was a wealthy, influential official in Antioch. Luke may have also been from Antioch, which would explain how the two men got to know each other.

It seems Theophilus was a Roman citizen who was a believer. Indeed he may have been a high-ranking Roman official because Luke referred to him as “*most excellent Theophilus.*” (Lk 1:3 23:26 26:25)

Now notice what he says to Theophilus: Luke speaks about *a beginning*: the things “*that Jesus began both to do and teach.*” But not *an ending*: for that doing and teaching is still going on, which is what the book of Acts is all about ! My the Lord Jesus did not leave for Home, until “*after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles.*” Now in all Christian work there are three indispensable elements, which are brought before us in these opening verses. There is,

(a) **THE WORD OF GOD: THE MESSAGE:**

My to effectively carry on the Lord's work, you need to know the proper message and Luke says that Christ taught the apostles right up until the time He ascended into heaven ! Of course He had taught them right throughout His earthly ministry, and Luke the author of the book of Acts, recalls some of the commandments in his gospel ! Let's go back to (Luke 24:44) I want you to notice here what was to be: **The SOURCE of their Message:** They were to handle the Bible with the same kind of insight and authority as Christ ! Look at **The SUBSTANCE of their Message:** “*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached.*” (Lk 24:47) And now it could be preached because Christ had suffered and had risen from the dead. Do you see **The SIGNIFICANCE of their Message:** “*in His name.*”

That was the significant thing. In the Acts we're going to see that everything was linked with that name. His was the name that would ring through Jerusalem and

challenge the very might of Caesar in Rome ! Look at,

The SCOPE of their Message: “ among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Lk 24:47) My do you see

The SUCCESS of their Message: For the Lord says in (Lk 24:49) And what power that was, indeed the Book of Acts is one long illustration of the power that came with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ! Now this teaching was entrusted to the “ apostles whom He had chosen.” My we need to know the Word of God before we can share it with others, there's no substitute for that. Hosea said, “ *my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*” (Hosea 4:6) One of the greatest problems in the church today is ignorance. Some folk who have gone to church for ten or twenty years know next to nothing about the Bible and God doesn't tolerate ignorance. He says “ Study to show thyself approved unto God.” (2 Tim 2:15) My are you thinking about stepping out into some type of Christian ministry ? Do you recognise your need to be trained ? To be prepared ? Christ taught the disciples right up until the time, He ascended into heaven. There was (a)

(b) THE SPIRIT OF GOD: THE MIGHT:

For (1:2) says that Christ gave His commandments to the apostles “ *through the Holy Ghost.*” Although it was Christ the second person of the Trinity who came to earth to minister, His ministry was accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit ! (Lk 4:14) Christ also said He came to do the will of

the Father (Jn 4:34) So all three Persons of the Trinity were involved in Christ's work on earth ! My the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of our Lord is something which is difficult for us to comprehend. I mean why God choose for Christ to be empowered through the Holy Spirit ? Was it not because that the Lord Jesus was setting a pattern for us to follow ? My all that we do for God, teaching, preaching, evangelising, is to be done in the power of the Spirit ! So there is (a) (b)

(c) THE MEN OF GOD: THE MEDIUM:

“ the apostles whom He had chosen.” (1:2) You see the Saviour chose His own missionaries, taught them, and commissioned them with certain responsibilities. My the same is true of us, we are chosen by Christ. He says: “ *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit.*” (Jn 15:16) But to be an effective teacher or evangelist for Christ, you have to be saturated with the Word of God. C. H. Spurgeon said “ *we might preach until our tongues rotted, until we exhaust our lungs and die but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit uses the Word to convert it.*” My are you delving into the Word ? Does the very essence of the Bible flow from you ? Are you actively taking it in and pouring it out to others ? (a) (b) (b) Now the interesting thing is this, that these three key elements are found dominate the book of Acts. (Chs 1-11) are full of the Spirit of God: (Chs 12 -20) are full of the Word of God and (Chs 21-28) are full of the man of God ! (1)

(2) THE RISEN LORD CONFIRMING

You see before the apostles could undertake the humanly impossible task of convincing a Christ-rejecting world of the truth of the Gospel, they needed to be convinced themselves that Christ was alive. So the Lord Jesus gave them “ *many infallible proofs,*” of His resurrection !

(a) CHRIST STRENGTHENED THEIR FAITH:

Luke does not tell us what these “ infallible proofs,” were. We know that when Jesus met His disciples, He invited them to touch His body, and He even ate before them (Lk 24:38-43) My whatever proofs He gave them they were convincing. And it was important for the apostles to know that the Saviour is a Risen Lord . Who wants to go around propagating the Gospel of a dead leader ? Christ showed Himself to the apostles so that they would know that He had conquered death ! He was preparing them for their ministry to an unsaved world. Do you one of the greatest proofs for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus ? The bold preaching of the early church ! The early church could not contain this good news.

To thousands on the day of Pentecost came the proclamation, “ *this Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses.*” (2:32) To the crowd on Solomon's porch Peter cried, “ *but ye denied the Holy One and the Just and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead: whereof we are witnesses.*” (3:14-15) All across Asia Minor, Europe and right to Rome pealed the same thrilling evangel, “ *Christ rose from dead the third day according to the Scriptures.*” What else can explain the transformation in the lives of the disciples from cowardice to courage ? The

apostles were confident because they had seen Christ in His resurrection glory ? And when He asked them to dine with Him at the Sea of Galilee, “ *none of the disciples dared asked Him, Who art Thou ? knowing it was the Lord.*” (Jn 21:12)
(a)

(b) CHRIST INCREASED THEIR KNOWLEDGE:

What did Christ do when He appeared to the apostles ? He spoke to them “ *of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*” (1:3) The Greek word for “ *kingdom,*” (*basileia*) means “ *rule or reign.*” The Lord Jesus spent three years with the disciples teaching them about the kingdom, and He did the same after His resurrection ! That must have encouraged the apostles because now they knew for certain that the promises regarding God's future kingdom would come true ! If Christ had never risen, they would have thought there was no hope for a future kingdom ! They would have wondered, *how can there be a kingdom some day when the leader of that kingdom is dead ?* (Zech 14:4 Rev 19:15 20:4) But Christ arose, and that restored the apostles confidence in preaching about the coming kingdom ! Do you see (1) (2) Look at,

(3) THE RISEN LORD CORRECTING

Waiting ! Isn't that often the hardest thing to do ? The excitement of those post-resurrection visits must have filled the disciples with excitement and fired them with enthusiasm ! They must have felt that, with marching orders from a Man who had conquered death, there was nothing they could not dare, no crowd they could not sway, no country they could not conquer, no confrontation where they could not succeed !

But my they needed more than enthusiasm. They needed the Holy Spirit ! That's why the Risen Lord gave them:

(a) CORRECTION CONCERNING SERVICE:

Look at (1:4-5) Now what was the “ *promise of the Father,*” that Christ had told them about ? The gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ told the apostles they would receive the Holy Spirit after He left them !

(Jn 14:16, 26: 15:26 16:7) You see the apostles had to receive the Holy Spirit before they could do the Lord's work ! Now in 10 days time they were going to be baptised with the Holy Spirit ! (1:5) That does not mean that a person receives the Holy Spirit 10 days after he becomes saved. My the situation in Acts was unique. Christ hadn't ascended to heaven yet to send the Holy Spirit ! Now every believer receives the Spirit of God the moment he receives Christ as his Saviour. Paul says, “ *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*” A person without the Holy Spirit isn't a Christian ! And we need the ministry of the Holy Spirit *to enlighten us, to enable us, and to encourage us !* Do you know *where* to go ? Do you know *when* to go ? Do you know *who* should go ? Well, the Lord Jesus says, “ *the Comforter He shall teach you, He will guide you.*” (Jn 14:26 16:13) Christ gave them (a) and then He gave

(b) CORRECTION CONCERNING SEASONS:

When Christ said they would soon be baptised with the Holy Spirit (1:5) the disciples thought that meant the kingdom was coming soon. They thought that Christ was about to set up His kingdom on earth

(Ezek 36: Joel 2:1) Now I want to notice Christ's answer ! Look at (1:7) Please notice that He didn't tell them there would be *no kingdom*. He simply said that *the time of the kingdom's coming* was not for them to know. My if there were no literal kingdom planned for the future Christ would have said so ! God didn't want His disciples to know when the kingdom was coming ! Can you imagine what would happen if we Christians knew the *time* of the second coming ? Generation after generation of believers would probably become slack in the Lord's work ! We don't know the *time of the Lord's Coming but we do know the truth of the Lord's Word* and He says, “ *Occupy till I come.*” (Lk 19:13 Deut 29:29) What are we to do until the Saviour returns ?

(4) THE RISEN LORD COMMISSIONING

The very last words Jesus spoke before He left for heaven were these, “ *the uttermost part of the earth.*” That was the Great Commission. These disciples were to tell the story to the untold millions still untold ! Did you notice,

(a) THE NATURE OF THIS COMMISSION:

Look at ITS POWER:

“ *But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*” (1:8) The Greek word translated power (*dunamis*) is the source of our English word *dynamite*. Every Christian is packed with power the Holy Spirit. The power is in you. It just needs to be released and that happens when you yield every aspect of your life to the Spirit's control. This is what the Bible means when it talks about being filled with the Spirit.

(Eph 5:18) Dr. A.C.Dickson said, “ *When we rely on organisation we get what organisation can do, when we rely on education we get what education can do: when we rely on eloquence we get what eloquence can do, but when we rely on the Holy Spirit, we get what God can do.*”

Look at ITS PERSONNEL:

“ *And ye shall be my witnesses unto Me,*” (1:8) My ... this is the recurring message of Acts. The word occurs no less than 39 times. (2:32 3:15 10:39 22:15)

“ *Witnesses unto me,*” people who tell the truth about Jesus Christ (Jn 14:26 1 Pet 3:15) The Greek word means “ *one who dies for his faith,*” because that was commonly the price of witnessing ! Christ didn't say we will be theologians though many think they are. He didn't say we will be lawyers, but witnesses, people who see something and tell others about it ! My ... if Christ has done anything for you then you are to witness to it, tell others about it, share your experience of Christ ! Are you telling others about Christ as you should ? Perhaps you have had the experience of having some neatly dressed young men come to your door and saying something like this. “ *Wouldn't it be nice if we had prophets today ?*” They then present to you an incredible religious maze. An amazingly complex religious system given under the guise of being a witness for Christ's latter-day church, their gospel is in reality a complete reversal of the good news of Christ's grace. For the true witness to which Christ referred is not like that.

To be a witness for Christ is to bring a message which is a marvel of simplicity: ***Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh, He died to pay for our sins, He was resurrected, now He is***

exalted in heaven, He calls us to believe on Him and so receive forgiveness of sins. My this is good news. There is nothing to join, no system to climb, just a person to receive and, in Christ eternal life. Have you noticed that the apostles were passionate in their witness for Christ ? Think about Peter on the day of Pentecost, Stephen at his stoning, Paul before the Governor Felix. They fervently promoted their faith. They were a band of zealous believers who turned their world upside down.

When George Whitefield was getting the people of Edinburgh out of their beds at 5 o'clock in the morning to hear his preaching, a man on his way to the church met David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and sceptic. Surprised at seeing him on his way to hear Whitefield, the man said, “ *I thought you said you did not believe the gospel.*” Hume replied, “ *I do not but he does.*” Do you want to be an effective witness for the Saviour ? Will, are you passionate for Him ?

Look at ITS PROGRAMME:

“ *In Jerusalem earth.*” Like a ripple in a pond their witness was to extend in ever widening circles “ *unto earth.*” Is this not the scope of the missionary heart ? Do we yearn for the gospel to go to the ends of the earth and into our own community ? There can be no burden for distant unreached peoples without a burden for unreached neighbours ! ***Christ demands a world heart !*** They fulfilled the Lord's desire in about 30 years. They didn't have sophisticated organisational plans, they just went out and did it ! Like your Master have you a burden for a lost world ? My this was (a) but look at,

(b) THE NEED FOR THIS COMMISSION:

For this commission is given in view of *The Ascent of the Saviour*: Luke uses three different verbs to describe His ascension “*taken up*,” (*epaireo*) “*received*,” (*hupolambano*) and “*went up*,” (*poreuomai*) Can you see the disciples as they viewed *The Ascent of the Saviour* and as they witnessed *The Descent of the Angels* ? “*Ye men of Galilee heaven.*” Will this not be fulfilled in that future day when the Lord returns during the battle of Armageddon with His own to set up His millennial kingdom ? (Zech 12:10 Rev 19:11) My the implication is clear. *Christ is coming, Christians get going !* Are you *committed* to His plan, His purpose, his programme ? Are you willing to spend and be spent ?

Nechayev, a nineteenth century disciple of Karl Marx, was thrown into prison for his role in the assassination of Czar Alexander 11. Prior to his death he wrote, “*The revolutionary man is a consecrated man. He has neither his own interests nor concerns nor feelings, no attachment nor property, not even a name. All for him is absorbed in the single exclusive interest in the one thought, in one passion revolution.*”

Although his motives and goals were wrong, is this not the heartbeat of true commitment ? The kind needed to accomplish the objectives of the Risen Lord ? My whether we live, whether we have health, whether we have sickness, whether we are rich, whether we are poor, our deepest desire should be **to please Him.**

And what does He want ? He wants us to be His witnesses ! There are no loopholes. No one can say, “*This does not apply to me.*” My our honour exceeds

that of any worldly ambassador, to China, to France. Christ’s last word to us is, “*Ye shall be witnesses unto me.*” Will you ?